

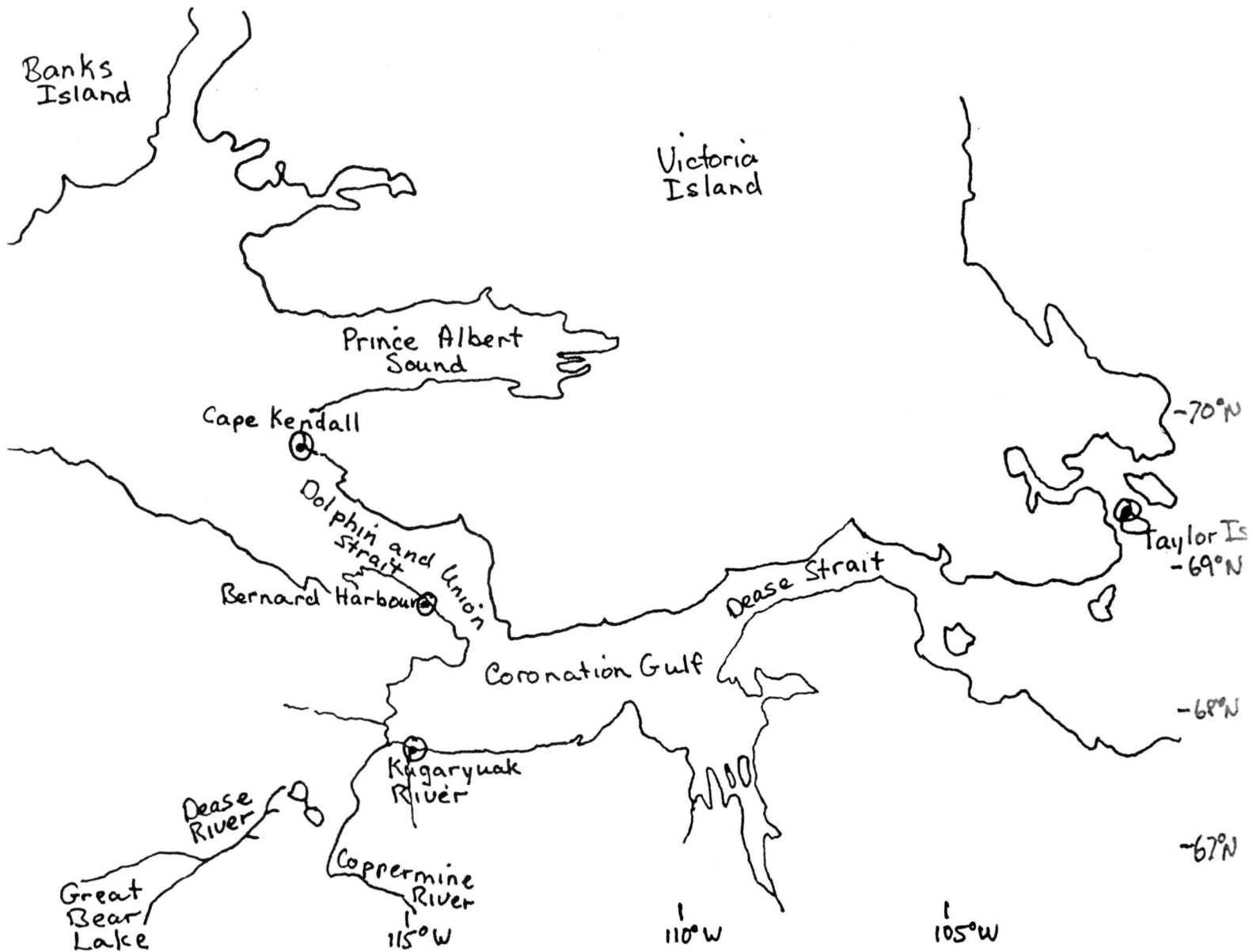
Report on

The Bernard Arctic Collection

by Susan Moogk

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Map



◎ Bernard's overwintering sites in the Coronation Gulf / Copper Eskimo country in the Canadian Arctic.

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It has been said that the function of museums is to collect, preserve and interpret artefacts. In the case of the Bernard Arctic Collection at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, the first two obligations have been met. As for the third duty, this fine collection of Copper Eskimo artefacts would make a classic display.

Collecting; the Creation of the collection.

The collection was assembled by Captain Joseph F. Bernard, a hunter and Free Trader (Jenness 1922:243) who spent many winters in the Arctic waters between Siberia and Central Canada. Apart from several missionaries and explorers, he was the first white man to live in the Copper Eskimo country for any extended time. Bernard spent at least seven winters in the Coronation Gulf area with an Eskimo crew on his thirteen ton gasoline schooner the "Teddy Bear". The explorer and anthropologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson had contacted the Victoria Island Copper Eskimo in May 1910 and had spent the summer with them. But a few months later, in the fall of 1910, Captain Bernard anchored a few miles east of the mouth of the Coppermine river, and remained there for the winter. Meanwhile, Stefansson and R.M. Anderson, later the head zoologist at the National Museum of Canada, wintered inland, away from the Copper Eskimo, on the Dease River. Stefansson was not aware of Bernard's proximity until the spring of 1911, when he engaged Bernard to ship out some ethnographic specimens destined for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. In 1912-13, Bernard overwintered in Bernard Harbour in the Dolphin and Union Strait. The next winter, 1913-14,

was spent sheltered behind Cape Kindall on Victoria Island (Jenness 1922: 31). It wasn't until he left Cape Kendall in the summer of 1914 that Diamond Jenness, an anthropologist with the National Museum of Canada, and the Canadian Arctic Expedition organized by Stefansson and Anderson, set up their headquarters at Bernard Harbour, named in the Captain's honour.

Bernard returned to the arctic in the summer of 1916, and spent the 1916-17 winter at his first wintering place near the mouth of the Coppermine river. He sailed around the Coronation Gulf in the summer of 1917 (July 22 to August 16). For the next two years the "Teddy Bear" was held fast by the ice off the southeast corner of Victoria Island until September 1, 1919 (Jenness 1922: 243-4). Because it was so late in the season, he was forced to spend the winter of 1919-20 near the mouth of the Coppermine river as in 1910-11 and 1916-17, at the Kugaryuak river.

During the 1920's, Captain Bernard's base was in Alaska. Some of his correspondence comes from the gold mining centre of Nome. He spent the winter of 1920-21 in "the south". In December of 1920 he was in Ottawa (Jenness 1922: 248). In the winter of 1921-22 he was shipwrecked and stranded near East Cape in Siberia (Mys Deshneva, on the Chukchi peninsula) (Letter, Bernard to Father Devine, December 19, 1922; see Appendix A1). In August 1922, Captain J. Bernard was contracted by Vilhjalmur Stefansson to rescue Stefansson's ill-fated colony on Wrangle Island where he was attempting to establish a territorial claim for Canada. Though Bernard was unable to land on the island, and contact the colonists, Stefansson had only praise for his efforts and Arctic skills (Le-

Bourdais: 166; Stefansson: 259). In 1923, Bernard sailed the "Teddy Bear" on a "northern Alaska cruise with a Geological Survey Party". During this period, his mailing address was Seattle, Washington. After 1925, Cordova, Alaska was his mail pick up base.

In his last letter in the Loyola archives, (April, 1925), Bernard expressed a growing interest in fox ranching in Alaska; he was considering settling down. Unfortunately, Bernard's trail, and his correspondence with Loyola College ends abruptly at this point.

Even though R.W. Hingston refers to the captain's work "in the cause of science and religion" (Letter Hingston to Bernard, May 29, 1921) he was primarily a trader, A Free Trader, trading man factured goods for fox furs from the natives of the arctic. Free Traders were small, independent men who operated in the Canadian Arctic who were not servants of the Hudson Bay Company, which has continued to dominate the arctic fur trade in this century even though it lost its chartered monopoly to the northern fur trade in 1809 (Stefansson: 68). When the Hudson Bay Company set up permanent trading posts in the Coronation Gulf area between 1916 and 1918, private trading ventures in the area became unprofitable, and Bernard had to look elsewhere to earn a living. He had done some chartered sailing for Stefansson in 1911, so he chartered the "Teddy Bear" for at least two expeditions in the early 1920's.

Joseph Bernard's origins are a bit of a mystery. I believe he was a French Canadian, because his mother tongue was French (Jenness 1922: 243). He was a devout Catholic. He made several retreats at Loyola College when he was in the "south". In the arctic he sought out the company of Catholic missionaries. He was a humble

and modest man. Diamond Jenness, when he had an opportunity to meet Bernard in Ottawa, was not able to coax much information from him; nor did he donate many artefacts to the National Museum. But Bernard was a very capable man in his own milieu - as a sailor and trader he over-wintered successfully in the most remote areas of the arctic, which had a climate that few white men were knowledgeable or capable enough to survive.

It seems that Bernard's "scientific career" must have begun in 1911 when he met Stefansson, much to the later's discomfort and chagrin, on the Coronation Gulf. This probably marked the time when, inspired by the explorer's example, Bernard began to collect ethnographic specimens. Most of Bernard's collection comes from an era when the material culture of the Copper Eskimo showed evidence of only minimal contact with Western Civilization. Judging from the preponderance of authentically utilitarian harpoons, bows and arrows, Bernard must have done most of his collecting before the Hudson Bay Company set up its four trading posts in the Coronation Gulf area between 1916 and 1920: or at least before the effects of this intrusion were felt by the Copper Eskimo culture. Thus, while the bulk of Bernard's Copper Eskimo specimens may have been collected between 1911 and 1920, the Netsilik specimens were probably acquired between 1917 and 1919, the two years the "Teddy Bear" was caught in the ice. One could assume that the Siberian and Alaskan specimens were added during his later peregrinations in the 1920's.

Captain Bernard also worked for Dr. R. M. Anderson, Stefansson's second-in-command. In 1911 he ferried him from the Coronation Gulf to the Bailie Islands, then the easternmost outpost for picking up mail in the Canadian Arctic (LeBourdais: 56). Anderson must have

won Bernard's confidence, for in 1920, Bernard sent him a report outlining Bernard's ethnogeographical and archaeological findings for the years 1916 to 1920, choosing Anderson over Stefansson and Jenness as a correspondent.

Bernard pursued his scientific interests into the 1920's. In 1921 he sent his collection to Loyola College in an effort to raise some money by selling it. When this scheme failed, he gave it to them as a gift in 1924. In the winter of 1920-21, he initiated correspondences and acquaintances with the curator of the Loyola College museum, Father Hingston, and with Diamond Jenness, the curator of ethnology at the National Museum in Ottawa. Later, in 1923, Captain Bernard and the "Teddy Bear" were chartered to carry a Geological Survey party from Nome, Alaska to northern Alaskan waters.

Preserving; history of the collection

From its ^ecreation, Bernard's collection has beenⁿ quite well documented. In May of 1921 Bernard's collection was sent to Loyola College in Montreal from Ottawa as a loan. It was followed by a list with "each article designated by number and... a description of each article" (letter, Bernard to Directors of Loyola College. May 15, 1921). The collection was to be displayed in a museum planned for the new college buildings which were under construction by December 1922 (letter, Bernard to Father Devine. December 19, 1922).

On May 10, 1924, Joseph F. Bernard donated his collection to Loyola College with the intention of adding to the collection. Though in April, 1925 the collection was still stored in the base-

ment of the college (letter, Bernard to Hingston, April 30, 1925), evidently part of the collection was eventually put on display as we have a partial catalogue (see Appendix A2), which is arranged by 'case' numbers. The objects, each identified by 'Field number' and by 'Loyola number', are fulsomely described as to their native name, material of manufacture, place of origin, and function. I am certain that many of the objects remained in storage because they were still tied together in small bundles in 1982 when I began to accession them. The heavy hemp twine and expert knots were very nautical.

The end of World War II, like the end of World War I, signalled a change for the Loyola Museum and the Bernard Collection. In July, 1947, Dr. T. T. Paterson of Cambridge University "rearranged and labeled the collection". Then, it seems, the Loyola Museum's collections were dispersed. In August, part of the Bernard collection was presented to the Arctic Institute of North America in Montreal for their new museum (letter, Washburn to Father Brown, August 7, 1947). This museum never opened and the Institute moved to Calgary (letter, Marielli to Moogk, June 21, 1983). A few months later another part of the collection was given to the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge (letter, Paterson to the Rector of Loyola College, December 4, 1947).

When the second part of the Bernard Collection came to Cambridge, Dr. Paterson divided his new acquisition into two groups; one consisting of the specimens he wished to keep and the other, those specimens which were duplicates and ^{by} thus valuable for trading

to other museums. He recorded this division in the small red notebook which accompanies this report. His list forms part of Appendix B of this report. The "Keep" group was catalogued (1948:1-265 Approximately). Of these catalogued items, a few choice and typical artefacts were displayed, while the rest were stored in the drawers of the display cabinets in the museum's public hall. The "duplicates", were put in the storage area cupboards, unaccessioned and uncatalogued.

In 1982, as part of the renovations to the Cambridge museum, the store room was emptied and the "duplicates" discovered. At Dr. Deborah Sparrow's suggestion, I undertook to accession and catalogue them. Some detective work was necessary for there was nothing to identify the artefacts except for a few tags which read "Bernard Arctic Collection, Loyola College, Montreal" and the small red notebook. A search of the museum's newly organized archives revealed nothing. A letter was dispatched to Concordia University in Montreal. It is the present day institution which was formed when Sir George Williams University and Loyola College were amalgamated in the 1970's. Nancy Marielli of the Concordia University Archives sent a reply with copies of the Bernard correspondence and the display catalogue (See Appendix A). Meanwhile, with the help of Dr. Balicki and Susan Rowly, the artefacts were identified tentatively as Copper Eskimo and rather old. Analysis of the contents of the red notebook revealed that the number and variety of Copper Eskimo artifacts catalogued in 1948 as belonging to the Bernard collection corresponded very closely with the number and variety of "keeps"; similarly, the uncatalogued artefacts on the study tables corresponded with the "duplicates" (see Appendix B for the comparison). I concluded that these unaccessioned artefacts were the balance of

Paterson's 1948 acquisition. As I proceeded to accession the collection I noted what I could of the ^mcircumstantial evidence that all the artefacts belonged to a single collection. Thus I recorded which items were found together, tied in bundles, and which items had old numbers attached to them (These notes form Appendix C). Several months later, with the Concordia archival material in hand, I compared the few tag numbers on the uncatalogued Cambridge artefacts to the numbers and descriptions in the short catalogue from the Loyola display; they matched perfectly. There was no longer any doubt but that the assemblage I was studying had been collected by Captain Bernard.

I proceeded to catalogue the "duplicates". I relied on Diamond Jenness' "Material Culture of the Copper Eskimo" for nomenclature. Appendix D illustrates the points at which I had to expand on Jenness' terminology. Because the Loyola catalogue did not come to my attention until after I had left Cambridge, there remains the task of adding Captain Bernard's own information to the Cambridge Museum's catalogue, especially that regarding the seal net, the sealskin slippers, the bird bolas and the ivory carving of a woman, none of which are from the Copper Eskimo.

In all, over 800 catalogue entries were recorded between November 1982 and May 1983. I completed the task by photographing a few of the most outstanding and some of the most typical artefacts. The negatives and photo contact sheets accompany this report; and a list of the negative frames and the catalogue numbers of the artefacts in each frame can be found in Appendix E. Finally,

I wrote this report to be filed in the museums's archives for future reference

Interpreting: The Nature of the Collection

The Bernard collection consists mainly of a large assemblage of classic Copper Eskimo artefacts. The other items in this collection which are from the Central Arctic are of some interest while those from Siberia are a curiosity and those from Alaska, apart from some ivory carvings, are rather ordinary by museum standards.

It is the age of the Copper Eskimo material (1911-1920) ^{*} that makes this collection so important. The artefacts are remarkable in that they display so little evidence of contact with Western Civilization.

The wide range of artefacts in Bernard's collection, as well as the quantity of artefacts, adds to its value to scholars. Many areas of ethnological studies are represented; economy, technology, Social organization and if one looks carefully, religious beliefs.

The gamut of a Copper Eskimo man's economic responsibilities are represented by several tool kits for working wood and bone, some hunting gear for caribou and seals, and fishing gear. The elegant blades of the men's all-purpose knives would catch anyone's eye. The tool kits are neatly contained in skin pouches designed to be attached to the hunter's bow case. The Inuits' ingenious utilization of bone with bits of wood, iron and copper is obvious. The tool kits contain bone-handled burins, saws, iron files and bow drills, with bows of bone and mouth pieces made from the wrist bones of a seal's flipper. There are also tools which are more specialized, for making and repairing bows and arrows;

* Note: Collections of comparable age are the Stefansson collection at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Jenness collection at the Museum of Man in Ottawa.

arrow straightners, of bone, and small wood boards used as templates and platforms to trim feathers for arrows. Bone marlin spikes and twisters abound. These come in sets of four, two twisters and two spikes, and were used to tighten the braided sinew backing which gave spring to the bows.

The men used the bows and arrows to hunt caribou in the summer. Many of the bows in the collection are still in their caribou skin cases. The handles of the bow cases were often incised and the Bernard collection includes several loose handles which must have been included for the sake of the decoration. The caribou skin arrow cases, some still holding bone and wood arrows with copper and iron blades, are still tied to the bow cases, with caribou skin thongs tipped with the small, graceful threading toggles which could also be used for carrying home dead ptarmigan by pinning their wings together. Quite often, a tool case holding a few basic tools, bits of materials for repairing arrows, and bow tightening tools is hung between the bow case and the arrow case. Some of these tool cases contain two types of bone gadget for carrying home the butchered caribou meat; carrying handles and bone pins for fastening skin bundles of meat and stomach bags of blood.

In the winter the men hunted seals out on the sea ice with harpoons which they thrust through the seals' breathing holes in the ice. Several of the harpoons are still lashed together with the bone snow probes used to locate the seals' holes, the long handled ice scoops used to uncover the hole, and the delicate bone seal indicators used to detect the seals' arrival at the breathing holes. A pair of wooden snow goggles are attached

to one harpoon, awaiting the sunny day they will be needed to protect the hunter from the glare of the sun on the ice. The collection also includes the heavy bone pins used to close the harpoon wound in the seal's tough skin and the bone toggles used to haul the dead seal home.

The specialized fishing gear in the collection indicates that the Copper Eskimo exploited several fisheries. In the summer, everyone, men, women and children caught arctic char (a salmon-trout) when they ran in the streams by chasing them into stone weirs; many were then caught by hand, some with leisters with bone prongs and iron barbs. Other, smaller fresh water fish were caught with small hooks on bone shanks, sinew lines and curved hand rods. In the winter, cod were caught through the sea ice with lures made from bone and bears teeth, and large bone-shanked iron hooks.

Bernard's collection sheds light on the women's economic role as well. There are several fine examples of the women's special knife, the ulu. The yellowed bone handles and the elaborate curve of the iron blades of Bernard's ulus are old and rare. The women did all the sewing; there are a number of plain and decorated needle cases; a double needle case was catalogued in 1948. Inside, and attached to the needle cases are the usual needles (some of copper) and thimbles. There are also some unexpected appendages on the needlecases; marrow scoops and combs. All the clothing was made by the women, and a very complete selection of men's and women's clothing was catalogued in 1948. The women cooked and served the food. The cooking implements in the Bernard collection include stone lamps (large ones for use at home and small ones to use while traveling),

two large stone cooking pots, meat forks, small bone "knives" for chipping lumps of snow to melt for water and for dusting snow off one's clothing on entering the house. Musk ox horn ladles for drinking ^{broth or} water from a seal skin ~~water~~ bucket are plentiful. There are also round and oval wood dishes on which to serve cooked meat. The marrow scoops made of bone have carved finials.

Bernard also collect^{ed} some of the Copper Eskimos' efforts at self-adornment. There are several fine ~~old~~ bone combs. One of them is incised with lines and circles across the handle. There is a variety of tooth pendants, mostly strung on strips of caribou skin, and mostly caribou incisors. These may have been charms or decorations which were sewn onto their clothing.

A few children's toys found their way into the "Teddy Bear" - small bows and arrows, and even a miniature tool kit. There is also a variety of small stone pots and bone laddles. These miniature household gods may have been grave offerings (Jenness 1922: 176) or gifts to Bernard, for in later years such items were given to Hudson Bay Company officers as Christmas gifts.

Some dog sled toggles ^mind us that the Copper Eskimo travelled by dog sled over the winter.

Bernard's collecting was not confined to the Copper Eskimo. His collection includes some kayak harpoon rests which cannot be from the Copper Eskimo who did not use kayaks. From Siberia or Alaska, come two sets of bird bolas. The seal net is from Siberia, probably East Cape. Captain Bernard also obtained some pieces of ivory from archaeological digs in Alaska. There are several pairs of seal-skin slippers which may be from the Netsilik (most likely) or from Alaska or Siberia (less likely); the

documentary evidence is confusing. A series of small ivory carvings from the Netsilik are of great interest because they represent the Inuit carving tradition as it was in the 1920's before it was developed for today's large market in modern Canadian Inuit art.

Conclusion

Captain Bernard's extensive collection of artefacts from the Copper Eskimo provides a good opportunity to create a museum display on several aspects of Inuit life. ^{Furthermore,} The large numbers of each type of artefact offers a chance to measure the variations in any one type of object. ^{Then again} With this collection, there is an opportunity to observe several technical strategies for dealing, for instance, with a shortage of good wood. In the collection, the arrowshafts are composed of up to four short lengths of willow which are joined by simple and V-shaped scarfs in order to obtain a straight shaft from a curved branch. Short lengths of soft wood are scarfed and then backed with braided sinew to make bows of sufficient size, strength and tension in order to overcome yet again, the poor quality of the wood. No doubt a close study of the clothing and seal hunting harpoons would disclose other technological feats.

The collection could also be organized and displayed in terms of economic activities; caribou hunting, seal hunting, fishing; with the products of each activity being converted into food (cooking), clothing (sewing and curing) and implements (tool kits).

The organization of Inuit social life by sex is quite

apparent when the artefacts are divided into men's things and women's things - the two types of knife, for instance, are radically different. On the other hand, it is hard to find distinctions between the belongings of the rich and powerful and those of the poor and weak which would indicate social stratification.

While working on this catalogue I read Diamond Jenness' account of the Copper Eskimos as he observed them for two winters during Bernard's time in the Coronation Gulf. In his recital of mores and myths, cooking practices and legends, it is apparent that the Copper Eskimo maintained a sharp distinction between the land and the sea, and the animals from them, especially between the caribou and arctic char on one hand and the seal and cod fish on the other. A parallel distinction can be seen in the Copper Eskimo material culture. Caribou hunting bows, bow cases and arrows are made with caribou sinews, bones and skin; the seal hunting equipment is replete with walrus ivory, strips of seal skin and other sea products. It was interesting to see seal harpoon heads that were made of brass salvaged from European shipwrecks; it suggested to me that the ships were viewed as "from the sea" rather than "from the land". The ambivalent position of the polar bear is interesting. Its distinctively yellow bones and large white teeth appear on implements intended for use on both land and sea, the fishing leisters and cod fish lures. It is easy to conclude that the bear's land/sea duality discredits the divisions that were observed elsewhere. Instead, this duality could be seen as one source for the awe and fear that the polar bear evokes.

Other themes that could be used to organize a display

of this collection include "The legacy of the Thule culture" which archaeologists have identified as the historical progenitor of Inuit culture (McGhee 1972). This collection could also be used to illustrate an early stage of the impact of European contact on the material culture of a small society of hunters. For instance, it is interesting to note that the Copper Eskimo transferred their traditional technique of cold-hammering native copper to the scraps of iron that they salvaged from European shipwrecks.

Whichever approach one selects to organize these Copper Eskimo artefacts, the range, quality, quantity and age of this collection make it well worth the effort, time and money needed to exhibit the Bernard Arctic Collection.

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